

PE1595/VVV

Scottish Government submission of 11 April 2019

Thank you for your letter of 12 March relating to petition PE1595 requesting information on how the Scottish Government sees the petitioner being part of the work on shared spaces. The letter also requested comments on the role of national Government in relation to shared space.

Transport Scotland and Scottish Government officials have been working directly with a range of stakeholders, including the petitioner, on this important agenda.

As per the response to the Committee of 25 October 2017, a working group of stakeholders has been convened. The working group has agreed a focus on inclusive design generally, ensuring that streets are safe, attractive and fully accessible.

The working group involves representatives from a number of organisations, including groups representing people with visual impairments, such as RNIB, Guide Dogs Scotland and National Federation for the Blind (NFB). The petitioner is the NFB representative on the working group and is a valued member of the group.

Furthermore, the collaborative nature of this work has expanded and the Department for Transport (DfT) now participates as a member of the working group. Transport Scotland and Scottish Government officials provide overall coordination for the work and as well as secretariat support to the group.

The working group has committed to working with Transport Scotland and Scottish Government officials to co-produce guidance on inclusive design in order to address the concerns raised by the petitioner and others regarding shared space and to improve the accessibility of Scotland's street environments for all. An important initial step in this process is the commissioning of research into inclusive design which will inform the development of future guidance.

A key recent task of the working group has been to inform the development of the research specification into inclusive design. This specification has been finalised and procurement documentation for the work is in the final stages of preparation. We therefore anticipate to tender the work imminently with a view to a research team being appointed in early June. The research is planned to take place over a 7 month period with the final report expected to be available in early December 2019.

In addition to contributing to the working group discussions, DfT have agreed to co-fund the research, providing a contribution of £40,000 to match the Transport Scotland and Scottish Government contribution. The total budget for the work is £80,000.

In relation to the role of the Scottish Government on shared space, decisions on the design and implementation of schemes to alter or improve streets in local areas are matter for local authorities.

However, there is a clear role for enhanced national guidance to play in supporting the highest standards are employed in engaging with communities and developing proposals that meet the needs of local people.

Scottish Ministers have raised the profile and importance of the issue directly with local authorities. On 4 October 2018, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity and the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning wrote to Chief Executives of all local authorities and national parks to provide an update on progress related to shared space and inclusive design.

The letter informed Chief Executives of the activity of the working group and intention to commission research which would subsequently inform the development of guidance. Additionally, the letter also emphasised duties under equalities legislation when considering design proposals and urged that the highest standards of engagement are employed to allow vulnerable people to contribute effectively to the development of proposals that support inclusive design for all.

It is hoped that the steps taken to address this agenda demonstrate to the Committee the strong commitment of Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government to engage with the issues that the petitioner had raised in a positive and cooperative manner.

Transport Scotland and Scottish Government officials will continue to work productively with the petitioner and the wider working group to develop guidance on achieving inclusive design for all to help to deliver safe, attractive and accessible streets and spaces for all people across Scotland communities.